Research in the Northwest Territories

Community Guide to becoming involved in research

(photo: Louise Chavarie) (photo: Jean Polfus)

Why should communities be involved in research?

Involvement in research being conducted in your community gives community members and/or leadership an opportunity to influence the direction of research.

You can ask that visiting researchers work on issues that are important to your community and make sure that researchers explain the results in ways that people in the community understand.

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* Significant content in this guide has been adapted with permission from the Nunavut Research Institute and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's document, *Negotiating Research Relationships: A Guide for Communities*, and the Aurora Research Institute's, *Doing Research in the Northwest Territories: A Guide for Researchers Applying for a Scientific Research Licence*.

nwtac
NWT Association of Communities

PEMBINA institute
www.pembina.org

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What is research?

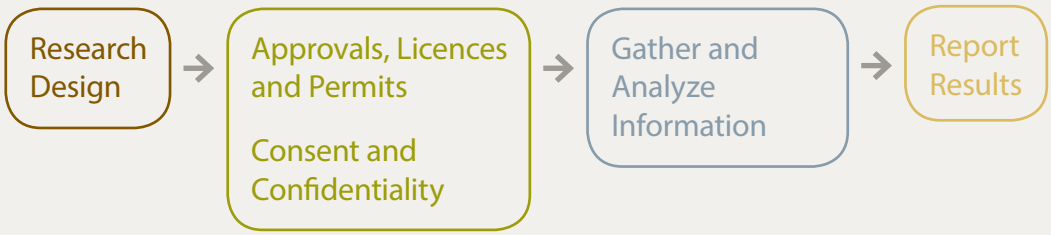
Research is a systematic process to gather, analyze and present information in order to answer a question or investigate an issue of interest or concern. In the NWT, both scientific and traditional knowledge research approaches are used to learn about people, wildlife, and the environment.

Information can be gathered in various ways, including:

a. Observing people's behaviour or activities.
b. Conducting interviews, surveys or focus groups.
c. Using non-public records that contain personal information about people.
d. Observing or counting wildlife.
e. Taking people's blood or other body samples, when not for medical purposes.
f. Capturing, then releasing, "tagging," collaring or killing animals and fish.
g. Collecting plants, ice, soil, water samples, artifacts or fossils.

The research process

During the research process, there are several points where communities can and should be engaged with the researchers. Community engagement should occur through the whole process.



Who does research?

Research conducted in the NWT is often related to resource exploration, health, and environmental impact studies. It is common for industry, government and health agencies to send researchers into northern communities. University researchers also commonly work in the north. Communities also take the lead on some research projects.

Some researchers are easy to identify because they come from outside your community, while other researchers may be members of your community. Often, community members are engaged as research collaborators, contributing technical skills and special knowledge of the land and wildlife. Researchers may also be medical personnel from health agencies or community health centres taking samples for health and environmental studies.

Researchers have a variety of motivations and objectives: for example, industry may do research to support a project, while academic researchers work to advance knowledge.

Research Design

When starting a project, researchers must decide on what they want to learn (research questions), how they are going to carry out the research (methods) and where the research will happen. The research team needs to be identified – it could include community-based staff and interpreters, possible community or regional partners, and funders.

Researchers who will work in or near an Aboriginal community should consult the Tri-Council Policy on 'Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada" and the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP).*

* www.naho.ca/documents/fnc/english/FNC_OCAPCriticalAnalysis.pdf. Researchers should also consult other available resources, such as www.nwtresearch.com/licensing/research-in-the-north.

How can communities be involved in research design?

Communities can ask researchers to look into issues that they are interested in, helping to make research responsible and useful. Communities can be active partners in planning and conducting research projects. Communities can also design and lead research and monitoring programs themselves, engaging outside researchers for support.

Communities may wish to set up a research contact and advisory group to review research applications, consider ways for the community to partner with researchers on projects, and give researchers guidance during their projects.

Questions for communities to think about:

a. How does this research relate to the needs and values of our community?

b. What would be the main benefits of this type of research?

c. If traditional knowledge is shared, how will researchers make sure that information is protected and not misused?

d. Who is available in the community to take part in the project as part of the research team or as participants? What kind of research training is available?

e. What resources – including time and funding – is required for community involvement? What funding is available to support our involvement?

Communities may work with researchers to:

a. Negotiate a research agreement that sets out the conditions for research, including the duties and responsibilities of both researchers and community members.

b. Agree on interpretation and translation needs and payment rates.

c. Find ways to actively involve community members in the research, such as hiring and training community members. For example, outside researchers could hire a local research coordinator and/or involve students at the school or college.

d. Hold a terminology workshop to go over the most important terms and concepts in English and local Aboriginal language(s) that are going to be used, figure out how they relate to what people are already familiar with, and how they can be interpreted across cultures.

Approval, licences and permits

Before gathering data, researchers must obtain research licences and permits from the appropriate authorities, such as the Aurora Research Institute (see nwtresearch.com or accessnwt.ca.) Communities are involved through the review process and have an opportunity to communicate their concerns.

It is a researcher's responsibility to make contact and address any potential concerns, questions and suggestions community members may have. Researchers must share how and why the research is being done, how it will affect the community, who is funding it and who is in charge of it.

What can communities ask for?

a. That applications be communicated in a way that the community members understand (i.e. translated, or in plain, non-technical language).

b. More time for reviewing the application.

c. Review and approval by a Research Ethics Board (e.g. university or government REB) is required for all research involving interviews or surveys of NWT residents. You can ask the researcher or ARI for this information.

Consent and Confidentiality

Researchers must obtain free, informed and ongoing consent from research participants. Consent means that you understand what the research is for, who is going to use the data and that you have formally agreed to be part of the research. **Researchers need to make sure that they have consent before they start their research.** This means that:

a. Participants have been invited to take part in the research before it begins, either in writing or verbally; they have received the information in their Aboriginal language if needed; and participants have formally agreed to participate in the research, usually by signing a consent form.

b. The research purpose and procedures are explained in plain english or the appropriate Aboriginal language(s) to make sure that people understand.

c. Identities of the researchers and funders are made clear.

d. Time and responsibilities expected of participation are explained.

e. Information about payment and reimbursement for participation is established up front.

f. Risks and benefits are explained.

g. Participants know they do not have to participate, or may withdraw at any time – participants should never be pressured to participate in research projects.

h. Community members are given enough time to ask questions, understand the information presented, and consider whether they will participate.

Researchers must maintain confidentiality as appropriate: participants must be given the option of requesting that their identities be kept confidential. This would mean that:

a. Names are not linked to information given, unless permission granted.

b. Personal information must be protected.

c. Participants must be told who may see or work with the information collected.

Gather and Analyze information

Community members may be involved in the collection of research information as interpreters, assistants, sources of information and researchers. People may be able to receive research training – for example in taking scientific samples, or doing surveys and interviews.

The community needs to decide whether it would be a good idea to ask researchers to add traditional knowledge as a component of the study. It takes effort, time and resources to do a traditional knowledge study well. The community also needs to consider the risks and benefits of sharing traditional knowledge. Some Aboriginal communities have their own research and traditional knowledge guidelines; for a variety of community definitions and policies, visit www.accessnwt.ca. In other cases, community leaders and experienced researchers can share protocols.

Researchers should ensure that their activities are coordinated with community schedules.

Fred Jumbo and Ron Kotchea with evidence of woodland caribou – fecal pellets (Sambaa K'e Woodland Caribou Field Survey Project 2009) (photo: Troy Marsh)

Deanna Jumbo testing water in Sambaa K'e (photo: Christine Wenman)

Report Results

Researchers report results by writing reports and academic papers, putting the information into posters, giving presentations and webinars, or making videos. At the minimum, researchers should provide their results to communities in plain language and provide opportunities for community members to ask questions and give their feedback.

How can communities be involved in reporting results?

a. By reviewing findings and reports to make sure that they are accurate.

b. By co-authoring reports, and co-presenting at conferences or meetings.

c. By collaborating with the researcher(s) on presentations to community members so that they are understandable and involve two-way discussion. Communities can also help to spread the word about those presentations to make sure a lot of people attend.

Communities can ask for copies of final reports and papers in plain language summaries, including in Aboriginal language(s).

Discussing operations of the municipal water cycle (photo: Caroline Lafontaine)

Christine Wenman facilitating (photo: Caroline Lafontaine)

Community Engagement

Information about the purpose of the research, methods involved, and findings should be shared throughout the whole project, not just at the time of application for research approval.

Before, during and after research has taken place, communities can invite researchers to:

a. Speak at community and council meetings.

b. Give talks at schools.

c. Provide non-technical posters of the research to display in the community.

d. Appear in the local newspaper or on the radio.

e. Provide short videos describing the research and its findings.

f. Co-present with community collaborators to make sure that everyone understands.

g. Provide copies of all reports and papers produced from the research, including plain and non-technical language versions.